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**Citation:** Lashmar, P. & Hobbs, D. (2017). Diamonds, gold and crime displacement: Hatton Garden, and the evolution of organised crime in the UK. Trends in Organized Crime, doi: 10.1007/s12117-017-9320-9

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# Diamonds, gold and crime displacement: Hatton Garden, and the evolution of organised crime in the UK

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**Abstract** The 2015 Hatton Garden Heist was described as the ‘largest burglary in English legal history’. However, the global attention that this spectacular crime attracted to ‘The Garden’ tended to concentrate upon the value of the stolen goods and the vintage of the burglars. What has been ignored is how the burglary shone a spotlight into Hatton Garden itself, as an area with a unique ‘upperworld’ commercial profile and skills cluster that we identify as an incubator and facilitator for organised crime. The Garden is the UK’s foremost jewellery production and retail centre and this paper seeks to explore how Hatton Garden’s businesses integrated with a fluid criminal population to transition, through hosting lucrative (and bureaucratically complex) VAT gold frauds from 1980 to the early 1990s, to become a major base for sophisticated acquisitive criminal activities. Based on extensive interviews over a thirty year period, evidence from a personal research archive and public records, this paper details a cultural community with a unique criminal profile due to the particularities of its geographical location, ethnic composition, trading culture, skills base and international connections. The processes and structures that facilitate criminal markets are largely under-researched (Antonopoulos et al. 2015: 11), and this paper considers how elements of Hatton Garden’s ‘upperworld’ businesses integrated with project criminals, displaced by policing strategies, to effect this transition.

**Keywords** Hatton Garden · Heist · VAT fraud · Gold fraud · Armed robbery · Drugs · Free market · Crime displacement · Organised crime

*‘To deal was to live’* (Block 1991: 38)

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## Introduction

Over a weekend in April 2015, the Hatton Garden Safe Deposit Ltd premises at 88–90 Hatton Garden in central London were burgled. Once inside, the burglars broke into seventy-three secure boxes taking valuables which were initially estimated as being worth £200 m (Buchanan 2015). The value and audacity of the theft attracted worldwide attention, and the media, who made comparisons to fictional Hollywood renditions of high-profile burglaries, christened the robbery ‘the Hatton Garden Heist’, and attributed the crime to foreigners (Campbell et al. 2015). In January 2016, seven Londoners were jailed for the ‘largest burglary in English legal history’ with a revised value of £14 m. They were led by ‘mastermind’ Brian Reader, aged 76, John ‘Kenny’ Collins, 75, Terry Perkins, 67; the other burglars were in their 40s to 60s. Inevitably, perhaps, the media and public focus has been on the ages of the thieves and the value of the haul, rather than on Hatton Garden, which in criminological terms, is a remarkable area of London.

On the western border of the City of London, ‘The Garden’, as it is known to its habitués, was until recently a world centre for jewellery, and has been home to many famous names in the precious stones and metals trade: De Beers, Johnson Matthey, Sharps Pixley, Mocatta and Goldsmid, N.M. Rothschild and the Diamond Bourse.

[Insert Map A. Caption Hatton Garden]

The catalyst for Hatton Garden becoming the jewellery centre was De Beers, the diamond mining corporation, setting up their headquarters nearby at Holborn Viaduct in the 1870s (Lichtenstein 2013: 183). Jewish traders had begun moving into the area during Queen Victoria’s reign, many of whom had fled from pogroms in Eastern Europe, although it has always remained multi-ethnic. For much of the twentieth century Hatton Garden’s esoteric business rituals often took place on the street or in ethnic cafes such as the ‘The Nosherie’ in Greville Street, with its veneer-panelled walls (Lichtenstein 2013: 92–100). However, with such a concentration of sought after, high value and easily transportable goods, Hatton Garden has had a darker transgressive history.

Benney (1936) attributed discrete criminal skills to specific London areas, and vernacular knowledge has long associated parts of the city with specific signature crimes (Leeson 1934). While scholars have long focused on the relationship between place and crime (Bottoms 2007; Evans et al. 1992; Vann and Garson 2001), the notion of a criminal area is closely linked to the Chicago School, which afforded primacy to working-class habitation emerging ‘naturally’ (McKenzie 1924) in relation to a specific population: a cultural rather than geographical or physical concept (Morris 1957: 9; Rock 1973: 30). Burgess (1929), claimed that when a social system emerges as characteristic of a locality, it is legitimate to refer to a ‘cultural community’ (see also Scott 1937), while Hobbs (1988, 1995, 2013) located market relations as the central ethos of contemporary cultural communities, noting that entrepreneurship had come to dominate both legal and illegal markets. Other research has shown concentrations of crime in specific locations because of the commerce taking place there (Hadfield 2006; Hobbs et al. 2003; Winlow 2001), and our concern here is to consider the manner in which area-based legitimate economic activity can become a driver of major shifts in criminal markets.

Merging opportunity theory (e.g. Clarke and Felson 1993) and social network theory (e.g. Morselli 2005), Kleemans and de Poot (2008: 90), observe that organised crime<sup>1</sup> draws upon skills emanating from legitimate business and, that for legitimate businesses, ‘illegal activities can sometimes become completely interwoven with their daily pattern of activities’ (ibid.: 84; see also Naylor 2003). This paper examines the development of organised crime, as a process of displacement and diffusion, evolving from a learning curve provided by white collar crime — in particular VAT Gold Fraud. We are interested here in the displacement and diffusion of crime as a result of successful crime prevention (Windle and Farrell 2012; Clarke and Felson 1993; Hill and Pease 2001), which here will be discussed in terms of criminals adapting to changing law enforcement priorities by shifting to new criminal opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

## Methodology

It has been proposed by our sources that at the end of the 1970s The Garden was the birthplace of VAT gold frauds, which then took on a professionalised scale of entrepreneurial criminal facilitation, creating a servicing base for a range of criminal activities. The key research questions addressed in this paper are:

As a result of an integration of upperworld facilitators, facilities and local skills, did Hatton Garden provide a career-enabling environment for displaced professional criminals?

Did the innovation of VAT Gold Fraud diffuse the necessary crime skills to external networks and locations?

Did career criminals utilise skills acquired through association with the Hatton Garden business community to innovate serious crime (including drug importation) methodologies?

Have the facilitators and skills within Hatton Garden provided an entrepreneurial base for serious organised crime?

This paper draws on a range of methods.

- Original field work.
- Use of primary sources and related secondary source material
- A review of criminology and other texts.
- Unstructured interviews and email exchanges with a range of interviewees and academics.

At the heart of the paper is historical and ethnographic research conducted by the authors since the early 1980s. The narrative and quotations are taken from some of the 30+ people interviewed about their knowledge of armed robbery, VAT fraud, money

<sup>1</sup> Levi (2014), Hobbs (2013), and von Lampe et al. (2006) among others, have discussed the problems of defining organised crime and, for the purpose of this paper, the authors use the definition provided by the National Crime Agency: (<http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/crime-threats/organised-crime-groups>).

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the evolution of the notion of organized crime in the UK see Hobbs (2013). For the subsequent development of the UKs anti-organised crime police agencies see Hobbs (2013: 13–40), and Harfield (2006; 2008). For a valuable discussion of the absence of a reliable database for this development see Gregory (2003)

laundering and drug trafficking and Hatton Garden. These interviews were conducted from 1981 to 2016 (see appendix 1) and were noted in detail or recorded and, in some cases, partly transcribed and held in one of the authors' personal archive (see appendix 2 ARCHIVE). Unless otherwise stated, all interview quotations with traders, criminals, lawyers, customs officers, solicitors and police, were undertaken by Lashmar (an investigative journalist until 2009). Quotations from some of these interviews were used in published articles (including Leigh and Lashmar 1986; Lashmar 1993, 1998). Anonymity is given where the interview is not a matter of public record and other names are anonymized by the original request of the interviewees. The interviews, which conformed to good scholarly practice as well as journalistic practice, took place in the UK; the interviewees were aware of the occupation of the interviewer and consented to publication. Interviewees had the right to withdraw their interviews if they chose. Some interviewees were interviewed a number of times. No interviewee was paid and no ethical issues arose during the interviews. All material that was available for publication was scrutinised by senior editors and lawyers experienced in the UK national media for ethical and legal issues. On a number of occasions requests to interview law enforcement personnel was approved at a senior level in those organisations, and on four occasions a press officer was present. Wherever possible any assertion made by an interviewee for this paper was compared against evidence from other interviewees or the documentary record, including police and court records from the time. Research methods were in line with good historical and ethnographic scholarship. One of the authors spent time in the years from 1986 to 2016 in Hatton Garden acquiring insight into daily life in the area. Interviews took place in locations where the interviewee felt most comfortable: these included homes, pubs, offices, restaurants, coffee shops, customs offices and on one occasion in a casino (Spradley 1979; Heyl 1979, 2001; Pilkington 2016). Some were conducted on the telephone (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 117). Interviews were unstructured.

In addition, a literature review was undertaken from texts, newspaper cuttings, legal records, court records, the National Archives and personal documents. The wide-ranging archive (ARCHIVE) of some forty lever-arch files also includes company records for business used for VAT frauds. There is little literature on Hatton Garden or VAT Gold frauds, so the review is brief, but relevant academic texts are considered throughout the paper.

## Research

It is important in setting the context to note that many of Hatton Garden's traders were, and are, viewed as honest. These traders are represented by the Hatton Garden Association. Judy Head, then company secretary of the Association, writing in 1998, emphasised that most traders were honest and tended to be the victims of crime rather than perpetrators:

*Of course there are bad apples in the barrel. Of course there are (or have been) scams of one sort or another; but these involve a tiny minority of dealers, usually*

*strangers to this part of the world and none of them members of [...] the Association.*<sup>3</sup>

According to interviewees and secondary sources (Finch 1992; Graham 1998; Hirsch 1998; Lichtenstein 2013), for much of the twentieth century, the jewellery business in Hatton Garden operated on an unwritten code of conduct between men who had dealt with each other for years, and who often walked around with a fortune in their jewellery pouches. A well-respected figure and trader in the area was Michael Hirsch, who had worked for the big gold dealers for 30 years by the time he was interviewed in 1998. He described the day-to-day scene of trading:

*'When I first came to the Garden the diamond dealers would do their business in the street, between 12pm and 2pm each day.*

*Business down here has always been based on trust. There is a Yiddish term — “muzel brocho”— my word is my bond. If someone reneged on a deal, they could never trade down here again (1998).*

## Criminal activity

Our research sources provide evidence that Hatton Garden exhibited an atypical crime profile specifically predicated on the area's unique commercial importance as the UK's jewellery production and retail centre. Hatton Garden is not a distinct police area, but is part of the Holborn sub-district of the Borough of Camden and therefore there are no separate crime figures for the area in order to produce a statistic-based crime profile. However, the authors' archive has nearly 100 cuttings from the old *Press Association* and *The Observer* newspaper libraries for the period 1931–1998 which report crimes of burglary or robbery in the Hatton Garden area to traders from the area (ARCHIVE Doc1). For example, in 1949 *The Evening News* reported that 'Hatton Garden Gets “Ali Baba Cave”', and that a safety deposit strongroom was to be built to save traders having to carry jewels and precious metals away from Hatton Garden each day. This was a response to robberies and burglaries in the . But still robberies continued. Typical reports of robberies are: the *Yorkshire Post* 23 May 1967 — '£9000 diamonds taken in Hatton Garden attack'. A serious crime was the murder of Hatton Garden Diamond Merchant Leonard Grunhut in March 1978 who was shot outside his Golders Green home with £250,000 in diamonds stolen by the murderer. Hatton Garden was a particular target for 'craft'<sup>4</sup> criminals such as burglars and safe-blowers because of the high value merchandise stored there.

Through key criminals it is possible to trace Hatton Garden's criminal evolution over decades. Brian Reader, the pensioner who was convicted of organising the 2015 Hatton

<sup>3</sup> Letter to editor of the Independent, 12 August 1998 in response to publication of Lashmar P (1998).

<sup>4</sup> Typified by the safe-cracker, craft crime (McIntosh 1975) suggests a comparison with the parallel world of industrially organised labour, where criminals were 'apprenticed' to older, more experienced, skilled criminals (see Hobbs 1995). However, with improvements in security and the decline of the cash economy, craft crime was gradually superseded in the 1970s by 'project' criminals, loose-knit groups who would rob banks or burgle banks or warehouses.

Robbery Safe Deposit burglary was part of a fluid but highly effective team of ‘project criminals’ — in this case burglars — from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, who not only stole from premises in and around Hatton Garden, but used their ‘social opportunity networks’ (Kleemans and de Poot 2008) there to gather intelligence and dispose of their takings, often meeting in the cafes and pubs (Goodwin 1982). A ‘Particulars of Offences sheet’ from the time show 29 commercial robberies by the team, many in the area, including a burglary at a diamond Merchants in Ely Place, EC1, in 1980, forcing entry into a jewellery manufacturer in Berry St, EC1, in 1978 and many other offences (ARCHIVE Doc 2).<sup>5</sup>

Newspaper cuttings reveal an ebb-and-flow of acquisitive crime in the area, along with peaks — like a three month period in summer 1987 when Hatton Garden suffered six robberies and 10 burglaries. One trader who ran a jewellery manufacturing company with 50 employees claimed that The Garden was a ‘no-go area’: ‘Things are so bad and the police are doing so little that this must be aired. What’s happening to me is happening all over The Garden’ (Reynolds 1987). The local police made it clear that they thought this an exaggeration and continued to deal with incidents on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, research for this paper indicates that during the twentieth century, the police failed to take Hatton Garden seriously as a specific crime problem.

Jewellery sealed the long marriage of convenience between The Garden’s crooked dealers and inner-city working-class crime families. Interviewed in 1992, the late Tony Lambrianou, once the youngest member of the Kray twins’ ‘Firm’, reminisced on The Garden in the post-war years:

*In the 50s, a lot of villains would put on a suit and go “on the knocker” round the suburbs, calling at people’s home and buying unwanted jewellery, paying silly prices to old ladies. Old Charlie Kray, the twins’ father, used to do it. You could make a good living on the knocker; then if you got a good piece you would take it down The Garden and that way a whole lot of alliances were made.*

*You can still make a living out of The Garden if you know the right people. You can get a nice piece of gold, a big bracelet or a necklace for half the price it will cost in the High Street. An iffy piece of gold is known as ‘in the trade’ and it won’t be ramped (hallmarked) but you are buying gold below the market price. Then you can knock it out in the pub to your mates (Lambrianou 1992a).*

Certain dealers straddling the legal/illegal divide were known to be ‘fences’ who dealt in stolen jewellery. Dubious dealers provided tip-offs to criminals as to when to rob a particular honest dealer or manufacturer’s premises to best financial reward. Another of the fences’ facilitation roles was to smelt stolen jewellery and then pass it onto the big legitimate bullion dealers and launder the proceeds (Lashmar 1993). Over decades large quantities of stolen jewellery has changed hands.

<sup>5</sup> After being identified by a supergrass, Reader left the country in 1982 and returned under an alias only to involve himself in the disposal of the gold from the 1983 Brinks Mat robbery (Pearson 2006).



The ease with which stolen jewellery passed through the Garden was shown in 1994, when four pairs of cufflinks and a tiepin stolen from Prince Charles was bought by a jeweller within hours of the burglary at St James's Palace. The jeweller later said he had purchased the items not knowing they were stolen and when he saw the pictures of the missing items in a newspaper he contacted Scotland Yard. The jewellery was returned, and the Prince thanked the jeweller, who had paid £450 cash for the £10,000 haul (Lashmar 1998).

## White collar crime — VAT fraud

Post-war Hatton Garden businesses were expert in evading Exchange Controls and moved gold and jewels around Europe (Finch 1992; Raynes 2016), but Hatton Garden's role in white-collar fraud was to take a gear change from the late 1970s with the emergence of VAT gold fraud. VAT was introduced in 1973, and administered and collected by HM Customs & Excise (later HM Revenue and Customs). Although there has been some research into the trans-European VAT fraud known as carousel fraud which proliferated between 1996 and 2006 (Rusev and Dzhekova 2015: 61–75; Frunza 2013: 46–57), there has been none regarding the earlier VAT Gold Frauds in the UK, despite the fact that within five years of their initiation the gross takings of the gold frauds were valued far in excess of £500 m (Leigh and Lashmar 1986). Gold supply to the public had been constrained by the Labour Government from 1974 to 1978, and one of the first acts of Mrs. Thatcher's new government in 1979 was to remove the VAT on gold coins like the South African Krugerrand in order to give private individuals freedom to trade in gold. However, the new government kept VAT on gold scrap<sup>6</sup> and coincidentally raised the rate from 8% to 15% making VAT fraud a more attractive proposition.

## Case study: 'Sammy and Albert' — early adaptors

How the fraud was facilitated by businessmen on the legal/illegal border is shown by two of Hatton Garden's best-known businessmen. 'Sammy' used to have a gold smelting and jewellery business but, by the time of being interviewed in 1992, lived in semi-retirement in a quiet north-west London suburb; he and his long-time associate 'Albert' were interviewed at their regular haunt, the Barracuda gaming club in Central London. Albert was a stocky working-class London-born jeweller and 'fence', with a string of convictions,<sup>7</sup> who worked from a drab backroom office assisted by several rugged lieutenants. 'Sammy and Albert' explained that the first 'back-to-back' frauds required a VAT certificate before the bullion houses would hand over the key

<sup>6</sup> Scrap is defined as any kind of precious metal not in the form customarily traded, such as jewellery.

<sup>7</sup> Their account of the rise of VAT fraud is supported by other research interviews including those with senior members of HMRC. The authors have examined over forty VAT gold fraud cases of the early 1980s which also support the 'Sammy' and 'Albert' account of its development.

ingredient of the fraud — the VAT. So the fraudsters registered for VAT under false names.

Sammy described the basic fraud:

*Then you were off. You go and buy from one of the big bullion houses like Johnson Mathey, say £100,000 worth of krugerrands paying a small premium. The coins were then melted down and sold back to another bullion house for slightly under the price of gold. So the team might get £98,000 plus 15% VAT; that's £114,800. After expenses their profit was £11,000 (although they still owe the VAT £15,000). The next day the team would buy £114,000 worth of krugerrands. And so it would go on. It might be three or six months before the VAT were breathing down your neck — by which time the proceeds would be in the millions, and the team would either have disappeared or started again under a different set of names (1992).*

By late 1981, Customs and Excise were aware that there was a serious problem of revenue collection in the gold market. A lot of VAT registered businesses were vanishing without paying their taxes. According to Raynes (2016) the first clue came when a notorious Hatton Garden character was picked up by the police driving a gold Rolls Royce while disqualified. Or, as Albert put it, ‘Suddenly all these blokes who hadn't had two bob were riding round in £20,000 cars’.

### **Crime prevention — crackdown on armed robbery**

The emergence of VAT Gold Fraud was to coincide with a displacement experienced in another, more violent, type of crime. A wave of armed robbery had emerged in the 1960s that epitomised McIntosh's project crime thesis which suggested that craft criminals had made way up the pecking order to ad hoc violent groups of robbers (McIntosh 1971, 1975). Armed robbery (McVicar 1979; Hobbs 1997) reached its zenith in the 1970s (Ball et al. 1978) but the ‘supergrass’ system began to make bank robbery a precarious profession, as some robbers were now giving evidence against dozens of their former associates in return for reduced prison time (Hobbs 2013; Cox et al. 1977). In addition, a number of robbers were shot by police while carrying out a robbery (Waddington 1991: 24). As Matthews (2002: 131) observes, by the early 1980s, the security industry had become more proficient at protecting valuables, whether in location or in transit, resulting in a gradual downturn in robberies (see also Gill 2000: 157; Jennings et al. 1991: 48–57; Mark 1978; Hobbs 1988: 62–83). These prevention strategies coalesced to leave armed robbers looking for a less risky form of acquisitive crime.

### **Crime displacement — from violent to white collar crime**

According to interviewees, The Garden grapevine started buzzing with word of a VAT fraud using gold. One of those credited with inventing the fraud was James ‘Bug Eye’ Marsden, a

Hatton Garden jeweller who was a close friend of some of London's most prolific armed robbers, including Mickey Green, James Jeffrey and Ronnie Dark (an intimate of the Great Train Robbers). Green, Jeffrey and Dark had all been named by the first supergrass, Bertie Smalls, in 1972 (Hobbs 2008) and, as they emerged from jail, Marsden recruited them to help in his VAT fraud. In line with Gill's (2000) notion of 'rational offenders', one former armed robber, 'Terence', interviewed in 1985, explained their thinking:

*Suddenly the blaggers (armed robbers) realised that instead of going across the pavement, tooled up and risking being shot by the Old Bill or grassed up by one of your own and getting 15 years, here was a way to make millions. Even if you got caught the maximum they could give you in the early days was 3 years. If you'd salted a few million away even that was alright ('Terence' 1993).*

When they stopped the Marsden fraud, with Operation Finger, on 14 October 1981, Customs claimed that £5 m had disappeared, along with Marsden, Green and Jeffrey, to Spain's Costa del Crime. Of those who remained, one was sentenced to three and half years in prison and fined £90,000. Ronnie Dark was jailed for a year and fined £3000. Several other members of the team were given short prison sentences and fined.

Armed robbers were quick to adapt to VAT fraud (Gill 2001: 287) with intelligence from 'social opportunity networks' that revolved around leisure locations like drinking clubs. Ex Customs & Excise officer David Raynes interviewed in 2016 described two key venues:

*The key to a lot of the villains getting involved was a 'Kalooki' (card game) school in Edgware which was frequented by Hatton Garden dealers and also some important criminals. The word also got around Mickey Green's club, a 'spieler' or drinking den for criminals — which was in Harrow.*

By 1982 VAT gold fraud was booming in The Garden and Customs ran numerous operations with names like 'Argonaut', 'Finger', 'Leonard' and 'Ernie'. In 'Operation Leonard' Customs arrested two former Great Train Robbers, Charlie Wilson and Roy James, the armed robber Danny Redmond, and a dozen other people. After being released from prison, Roy James had become a Hatton Garden silversmith — a trade he had learnt while incarcerated. They were accused of stealing VAT worth £2.4 m — almost as much as that stolen from the great train robbery. After two trials where the jury could not reach a decision, and Charlie Wilson agreed to pay compensation, the judge decided that the prosecutions should be abandoned.<sup>8</sup>

Customs started to crack down, and now a legitimate company was required for VAT registration. Although the consequences of the drive to 'free' the market and so encourage criminal and high-risk behavior has been more apparent since the market crash of 2008 (Hobbs 2013: 234–35), such concerns were barely acknowledged in the 1980s, and the criminal opportunities that

<sup>8</sup> Wilson turned his hand to drug smuggling, and in 1990 he was shot dead at his home in Spain.

emerged from the light-touch regulatory approach invited constant innovation and a series of ‘tactical crime’ displacements (Eck 1993). Albert explained the next variant of the scam which required the fraudsters to operate through a legitimate company:

*So I sent a conman down to a small jewellery shop out in the sticks. The conman rolled up and told the owner he was from the VAT and demanded to see his books. On the sly he photocopied the bloke's VAT certificate and I sold copies of it all around The Garden. Some months later the Customs tried to work out why some little bloke who had been turning over two bob a year was suddenly dealing £8m worth of gold (Sammy and Albert 1992).*

Diamonds constitute a segment of the unlicensed capitalism that pervades global trade routes, interacting seamlessly with both upper and underworlds (Hobbs 2013: 232–33), and it is important to note that a significant portion of this trade has its origins in an illegally sourced product (Vorrath 2014: 15–18; Siegel 2008: 85–112). Traders had experience in smuggling diamonds with networks extended to Africa where precious gems were routinely taken out of war zones and smuggled into the various interconnected specialist jewellery centres of the western world, including Hatton Garden (Koyame 2005; Nordstrum 2007).<sup>9</sup> In early 1982 the Government hastily re-imposed VAT on gold coins, and the fraudster's response was to smuggle in coins from territories where there was no, or very little, VAT (Pashev 2008). Traders who were adept at using smuggling routes, including those trafficking ‘blood’ or ‘conflict’ diamonds, were able to explain to their bankrobber partners, in return for a fee, the best ways to avoid border restrictions and controls. In a 1986 interview armed robber turned author, John McVicar, recounted vivid conversations with some of his former criminal associates who had moved on from robbery to the VAT fraud, and who described shuttling between London and locations where gold coins could be bought without too many questions being asked such as Jersey, Guernsey, Liechtenstein and Switzerland:

*At peak they (the fraudsters) would be coming in by private jet three times a week and they would bring as much as £2m a time. They made so much money they did not know what to do with it (Leigh and Lashmar 1986).*

## Counter-surveillance

Customs were taking a keen interest in fraud in Hatton Garden. Albert said that good intelligence was crucial in avoiding arrest.

*You would know when they used to come into The Garden, the phones would buzz, everybody would know what was going on.*

<sup>9</sup> For a concise overview of the role of smuggling within organized crime see von Lampe (2016: 297–300)

Good connections with corrupt police officers also helped.

*Up to 1985/86 I knew a DI (Detective Inspector) and a DS (Detective Sergeant) in C11 (Scotland Yard's Criminal Intelligence Department) — you can't get better than that — I knew what was going on and who was watching (1992).*

What can be seen, in examining the case notes of VAT gold fraud prosecutions, is that Hatton Garden businesses were providing back-up business services to support these heavily administrative crimes (ARCHIVE doc 3). Creating frameworks of legitimacy, some Hatton Garden's traders, accountants and solicitors could claim they thought they were acting for legitimate clients (Mack and Kerner 1975). Of the original first wave of twelve major Customs VAT gold fraud operations (1981–82), seven involved individuals with a record for armed robbery. All but one involved one or more Hatton Garden jewellers. Customs believed that other VAT gangs involving armed robbers had avoided arrest. Examining records of VAT gold fraud prosecutions over the period reveals that knowledge of the practice had quickly diffused from Hatton Garden circles into other parts of the country, and the fraud now appealed to some violent newcomers. In Jersey two Irishmen were arrested and later jailed for trying to use a bank draft stolen in an IRA raid in Dublin to buy Krugerrands to run a VAT gold fraud. In another raid Customs arrested an American later identified as a Mafia banker. Customs investigations showed the fraud had spread initially to cities with their own jewellery districts like Birmingham and Glasgow with links to The Garden.

## Brinks Mat

The Brink's-Mat robbery occurred early on 26 November 1983 when six robbers broke into the security firm's warehouse at Heathrow Airport (Darbyshire and Hilliard 1993). At the time, it was described as 'the crime of the century'. The robbers took gold bullion worth £26 million as well as diamonds and cash, and the sheer amount of gold meant it took several years to dispose of. The authors have examined court records that show that much of the gold was disposed through Hatton Garden connections. Among those involved in laundering the gold were Kenny Noye, later jailed for a road rage murder on the M25, and John Palmer who ran a Bristol company called Scadlynn and was later murdered. The gold was also used in a VAT fraud to further boost the profits.

Surveillance records show that members of the gold disposal team, including 2015 heist 'mastermind' Brian Reader, were working through Hatton Garden. For example, one log dated 23 January 1985 notes that Reader visits the cafe opposite Farringdon station (on the Hatton Garden border) where he receives an envelope in return for a bag. 'The white Mercedes used by A and W was parked outside the cafe. Reader returns to West Kingsdown (Noye's Home)' (ARCHIVE Doc 4). Reader was jailed for eight years at the Old Bailey in 1986 for conspiracy to handle stolen goods by assisting in the disposal of the 7000 gold bars. In their 1992 interview Sammy and Albert were eager to dispel what they saw as one of the Brinks Mat myths:

*The Yard thinks that the most of the gold from the Brinks-Mat job is buried awaiting a rainy day. They still dig up villain's gardens looking for it. But it all*

*went through The Garden and a lot of it went through 'M' ( a major Hatton Garden grey world trader). I remember there were some platinum bars from the robbery and they were so big he had to have them cut up before they were smelted and passed onto one of the bullion houses he did business with.*

In 1985 Customs recognised that Hatton Garden needed special attention and assigned one officer, Denis Graham, to keep in close contact with key figures in the commercial sector, spending a decade in the post. In an interview he described the problem that Customs had faced.

*When I joined the Customs' gold team — just about everybody in The Garden was suspected. It took a while to work out who was involved and who was trying to stay on the path of righteousness (1998).*

In 1987 another officer, Peter Finch, was also assigned to monitor fraud in The Garden and spent five years in the role.

## **Crime displacement 2 — white collar crime to drug trafficking**

With the Customs and Excise fraud prevention strategy becoming effective we can see another major crime type displacement, and the number of Hatton Garden habitués who had been armed robbers or VAT fraudsters (or both) turning to drug smuggling is notable. One former robber 'Terence' who was interviewed said: 'The gold frauds gave London's big time villains the money and the skills to get into the big drug importations' (Lashmar 1998). Again they innovated and we can track the displacement by those who were caught. While in Ford Open prison for VAT fraud, former armed robber Roy Garner organised a huge shipment of Colombian cocaine to the UK, for which he later received a 22 year prison sentence (Jennings et al. 1991: 183). Like Garner, Great Train Robbers Charlie Wilson and Roy James moved on from their VAT gold frauds, displacing to drug importation via Spain. Bug Eye's associate, Mickey Green, having fled the UK, subsequently became one of the most prolific British drug traffickers (Lashmar and Nash 2000: 10)(ARCHIVE/Doc 5 and 6). Statements given to Customs in the early 2000s by the drug trafficker and supergrass Michael Michaels, an associate of Green and the 'A-team' crime family, reveal a complex set of trafficking operations that start in 1985 ARCHIVE doc 5). At the centre of many of these operations was Hatton Garden jeweller Saul 'Solly' Nahome, the A-Team's unqualified accountant, before he was murdered outside his mansion in Finchley, north London in 1998 (Lashmar and Sengupta 1998: 3).

## **The A-Team crime family**

Kleemans and de Poot (2008: 79) explain that social ties are 'extremely important for explaining involvement in organised crime', noting that people have a much greater chance of getting involved in criminal activity if they are born into a family in which parents or older brothers are active in crime As Lambrianou reminds us, 'Brothers were

your strength' (1992b: 29). Hatton Garden has for decades been an operating base for the 'A-Team', one of Britain's major crime families. The 'A-Team' family were of Irish background and grew up in a tough inner-city estate in nearby Islington. Originally armed robbers, and particularly violent criminals, the three brothers were identified as major drug dealers by the mid-1990s. The one brother was no 2 on the 1982 Metropolitan Police Criminal Intelligence List as a 'top violent thief' (ARCHIVE doc 7). Another brother was linked to the criminals who disposed of the Brink's-Mat gold. They had their base in Hatton Garden and took advantage of all the facilities available to the criminal community there. They owned a building with a jewellery retail shop in Greville Street, a front operated by a Solly Nahome. This property was under surveillance by Operation TRINITY Police/MI5 operation against the 'A-Team' for considerable period in the mid 1990's. From Hatton Garden their operations spread out into London and encompassed drugs, financial fraud, money laundering, running a ticket tout business and illegal drug dealing. 'Harry', a Hatton Garden trader, said that by the 1990s The Garden had become a centre for laundering drug money: 'In the last five years it's all become drugs money down here.' He added: 'It has got very nasty and one has to be careful' (1992). In 2007 one of the 'A-Team' brothers was successfully prosecuted, putting on the public record extensive details of their Hatton Garden money laundering operations. Alison Saunders, head of the Crown Prosecution Service organized crime division, said: 'Through sheer persistence and determination we have been able to uncover sufficient evidence and build a strong case which left (A-Team brother) with no option but to plead guilty' (see Gillard et al. 2007).<sup>10</sup>

## Changing environment

Meanwhile, the legitimate side of Hatton Garden was undergoing change. Responding to global economic shifts, the diamond monopoly De Beers moved its trading floor from London to Botswana in 2013. In the early twenty-first century, although Hatton Garden is no longer the centre of the world jewellery market, 300 separate companies still support the trade in the immediate area, and nearly sixty retail shops are located in the street itself (Lichtenstein 2013). With the notable exception of the 2015 safety deposit raid, Hatton Garden premises are said to be very hard to rob because of the prevalence of CCTV and the numerous security guards standing in doorways up and down Hatton Garden and Greville Street. Many of the huge buildings that were once warrens of skilled jewellers have been converted into residential buildings to capitalise on the London property market. Nonetheless crime associated with the jewellery centre has not ceased, as news reports show, and the 'Hatton Garden Heist' itself shed light on more recent criminality in The Garden. The police made recordings of those suspected of the Hatton Garden Safety Deposit burglary using secret probes, and these recordings were subsequently used in evidence,

<sup>10</sup> None of the A-Team family were arrested for VAT fraud. The A-Team was wrongly attributed in some press coverage as being behind the Hatton Garden heist.



revealling that another leading crime family were also operating in Hatton Garden and beat up a jeweller who owed them money. This is Danny Jones talking to fellow burglar Terry Perkins:

*I was out the door about quarter to four this morning ANDREW<sup>11</sup> pulled up he ain't mentioned nothing he ain't said a fucking word. He said he's got a geezer in a flat in Hertford, he owes 1.7 million pounds, he's fucked a load of people out of diamonds and all that, they have got him, he went down to the GARDEN last week and smacked a geezer up, in one of the shop one of the (ed: name redacted). (ARCHIVE doc 8)*

## Analysis

The interviews from which the above quotations are drawn give a picture of how the grey world of Hatton Garden developed from the second half of the twentieth century and how social opportunity networks facilitated crime operations based there. David Raynes account of the role of the Kalooki club and speilers reinforces the role of social locations favoured by criminals and where intelligence can be exchanged. A precursor of these clubs can be seen in Benney's account of Uncle Fred's gambling den in Soho (1936: 72) and carry on through to Brian Reader's well documented planning meetings in a café near Hatton Garden. As Kleemans and de Poot point out (2008: 76): 'Many organised crime activities boil down to transnational illegal trade and other transnational illegal activities' and the more outward looking acquisitive Hatton Garden businessmen who already had international contacts and smuggling skills were able to help the wave of former armed robbers looking to make the big money. This transfer of skills was to equip major violent criminals with the knowledge and abilities necessary, post VAT fraud, to move into organised crime, notably as a logistics centre for drugs trafficking. In particular, project criminals — the armed robbers of the 1970s and 1980s formed long term relationships with individuals from Hatton Garden that enabled them to embed themselves into organised crimes emerging 'community of practice' (Hobbs 2013: 225–35) — a far more inclusive concept than the old underworld — which enabled the next step in the development of organised crime in the UK.

This paper traces a process of displacement and diffusion whereby offenders and the elements of the business community adapted, cat-and-mouse fashion, to regulation and law enforcement. The multi-ethnic composition of the local businesses and trades gave it an international perspective compared to the inward-looking traditional working-class inner London criminals. Hatton Garden also offered an effective anti-surveillance and anti-law enforcement environment, and is a fine example of a 'cluster' where clients could find the expertise they needed.

## Conclusion

This paper reveals, because of the peculiarities of its geographical location, ethnic composition, trading culture, skills base and international connections, the role that a



cultural community played in the rise of organised crime in the UK. As a result of an integration of upperworld and underworld, Hatton Garden offered facilitators, facilities and skills for expanding acquisitive criminal practices (van Duyne 1999: 432; Levi et al. 2004: 117; Middleton and Levi 2005: 123–61; Mack 1964), a career enabling environment for displaced professional criminals that drew ‘honest’ traders into crime. While VAT fraud was perpetrated by a wide range of entrepreneurially-minded groups all over the UK (Frunza 2013: 52) who in turn diversified into other crime, the intensification of skills, knowledge and resources in Hatton Garden, and the long-term presence of organised criminal interests in the very infrastructure of The Garden, has created an enabling centre of excellence for criminal innovation. VAT gold fraud diffused methodologies to external communities and locations through crime networks, and the facilitators and skills embedded in Hatton Garden incubated a base for serious organised criminals who utilised the skills acquired from the local business community to innovate drug importation methodologies which took them into mainland Europe and beyond.

This paper indicates that while there is a balance to be struck between ease of trade and regulation, ideologically-driven free-market policies to reduce regulation and enforcement take too little account of the facilitation of major crime. As Antonopoulos et al. have pointed out, the level and extent in which a criminal enterprise is embedded in the so called ‘upperworld’ — the sphere of legitimate transactions — is a major factor in its effectiveness (2015: 14). This has been confirmed in interviews with senior law enforcement officers (e.g. Byrne 2005; Raynes 2016). Areas such as Hatton Garden defy cliché, and epitomise the notion of organised crime as a flexible and constantly mutating ‘community of practice’ encompassing gradations of legitimate commercial expertise alongside its numerous unlicensed variations (Hobbs 2013). Indeed, as scholars have long acknowledged (Smith 1980; Landesco 1968) the complex relationships between legitimate and illegitimate enterprise (Ruggerio and South 1997; Chambliss 1978:8) make the quest for the ‘fabulous underworld of bourgeois invention’ (Benney 1936: 263) somewhat pointless. That Hatton Garden has functioned as a criminal support centre for a range of criminal entrepreneurs for so long, indicates a failure, not only of the collective imagination of UK law enforcement, but more importantly, of free market ideologues for whom the very idea of a criminal area remains associated with exclusively working-class tenure.

**Funding** The research was not funded.

**Compliance with ethical standards** All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

**Conflict of interest** The authors have no potential conflicts of interest

**Human and animal studies** Research did involve Human Participants  
Research did not involve Animal Participants

**Informed consent** For retrospective studies, please add the following sentence:  
‘For this type of study formal consent is not required.’  
Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

## Appendix 1

**Table 1** Interviewees

	Date	Name or alias	Occupation	Location
1.	1 Dec 1981	'AZ'	Solicitor then specialising in police corruption cases.	Office in West London
2.	11 June 1981	'Bob'	Hatton Garden freelance jeweller and criminal	At his home in Islington, London
3.	15 March 1982	John Goodwin (now deceased)	Commercial burglar	Café at Old Bailey, London
4.	22 March 1982	Brian Reader	Commercial burglar	Public House at Old Bailey
5.	23 March 1983	John McVicar	Former armed robber turned author	Restaurant in Covent Garden
6.	20 January 1983	'TV'	Businessman and handler of stolen goods	Shop in Shepherd's Bush Green, London
7.	25 September 1984	John McVicar	Former armed robber turned author	Chelsea Arts Club, London.
8.	26 September 1984	John Goodwin (now deceased)	Commercial burglar	Café at Old Bailey
9.	22 October 1984	John Goodwin (now deceased)	Commercial burglar	The Observer Building, London
10.	26 October 1984	John McVicar	Former armed robber turned author	Central London
11.	11 November 1985	'Terence'	Armed Robber	Public House, central London
12.	5 August 1985	Micky Regan (now deceased)	Member of a north London crime family and armed robber and went into drug trafficking	At Access Trading premises in Pentonville Rd., N1, London
13.	8 August 1985	Micky Regan (now deceased)	Member of a north London crime family and armed robber and went into drug trafficking	Prince of Wales pub, Caledonian Rd., N1, London
14.	13 August 1985	Charlie S	Member of a north London crime family and armed robber	Home in Islington
15.	16 January 1986	John McVicar	Former armed robber turned author	Home in south London
16.	2 January 1986	'AZ'	Solicitor then specialising in Vat Gold Fraud cases.	Office in West London Followed by correspondence
17.	20 June 1991	Hugh Donagher Retired by 2003	Asst Chief investigations officer Customs (VAT)	Telephone

**Table 1** (continued)

	Date	Name or alias	Occupation	Location
18.	15 October 1991	Denis Graham	Customs officer responsible for Hatton Garden	Public House, City of London
19.	17th October 1991	'AZ'	Solicitor then specialising in Vat Gold Fraud cases.	Restaurant in central London
20.	55 February 1992	Frank Jones Leslie Allan (+ press officer)	Senior Customs officers on Operation Babysitter	Harmsworth House, City of London
21.	13 March 1992.	Peter Finch	Customs investigator	Customs House
22.	31 March 1992	'Harry'	Hatton Garden trader	Café in Hatton Garden
23.	22 April 1992	Andy Scott (+ press officer)	C&E technical officer	Kings Reach House SE1
24.	13 August 1992	'Sammy'	Businessman and white collar criminal	Home in NW London
25.	25 August 1992	'Sammy' and 'Albert'	Businessmen and white collar criminals	Barracuda club, Central London
26.	5th October 1992	Tony Lambrianou	Criminal and member of the Kray gang	Public House, Mile End, London
27.	5 August 1998	Michael Hirsch	Hatton Garden trader	Café, Hatton Garden
28.	11 June 2002	'JA'	Former Flying Squad Officer 1971–72	Interview at home, West London
29.	21 May 2002	'AZ' and 'ZA'	Solicitors then specialising in criminal cases.	Office in Central London
30.	22 May 2002	'CZ'	Senior partner in leading Criminal law practice	Office in Whitechapel
31.	23 May 2002	Joe Cannon (now deceased)	Former armed robber	Home in Notting Dale, London
32.	28 May 2002	'BZ'	Senior partner in leading Criminal law practice	Home in West London
33.	18 June 2002	Jack Murton	Former armed robber	Bar in Notting Hill, London
34.	17 June 2002	Reg Dudley (now deceased)	Criminal	Nags Head Public House, Islington
35.	19 June 2002	'DZ'	Solicitor who acted in supergrass cases	Bar in Bishops Stortford
36.	1 July 2002	'EZ'	Solicitor who acted in supergrass cases	Restaurant in Holborn

**Table 1** (continued)

	Date	Name or alias	Occupation	Location
37.	7 July 2002	Eric Mason (now deceased)	Former armed robber and Kray associate	Hotel in Central London
38.	27 July 2002	'BR'	Former senior Flying Squad ex-DCS. (1955–77)	Home in Essex
39.	19 July 2002	Bernie Khan	Former armed robber	Café in Stepney, in London
40.	22 July 2002	Jim Smith	Former Met detective (C11)	Bar in Charing Cross, London
41.	29 November 2002	Richard Broadbent (+ press officer)	Chairman of Customs Board	Telephone
42.	27 February 2004	'CE' + press officer	Senior Customs policy officer	Telephone
43.	11 September 2006	David Raynes	Retired senior customs officer	Meeting in restaurant, also telephone and correspondence.
44.	7 Dec 2006	Terry Byrne	Head of C&E investigations until 2005	Café in Essex
45.	15 May 2008	Terry Byrne	Head of C&E investigations	Further email correspondence 2006–2010
46.	5 Feb 2007	'CG'	Former senior investigator	Café in Essex
47.	9 June 2007	John O'Connor	Former Met Commander and head of Flying Squad	Further correspondence 2006–2010
48.	28 June 2007	David Raynes	Retired senior customs officer	By email
49.	12 Oct 2007	Reg Dudley	Criminal	Document
50.	7 May 2008	'DH'	Former senior customs office	Telephone
51.	12–15 June 2010	Michael Michaels	Supergrass and convicted drugs trafficker	Telephone and correspondence. Public House, Islington Restaurant in the Strand Hotel in Cyprus

## Appendix 2

### Documents from Lashmar Archive (ARCHIVE)

ARCHIVE document 1 Hatton Garden file: newspaper cuttings 1876 - present

ARCHIVE document 2 Baker Street Robbery. Gervaise, M. Particular of Offences 1980

ARCHIVE document 3 Vat Gold Fraud file: Notes of Customs operations from court documents

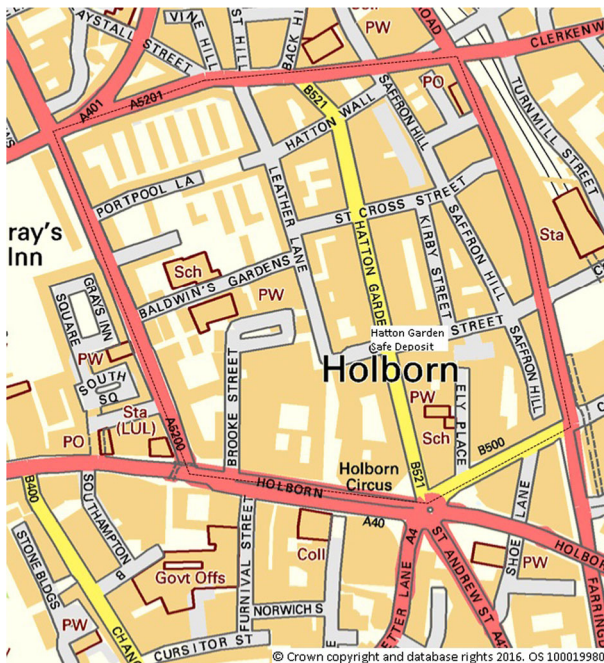
ARCHIVE document 4 Brinks Mat Robbery file

ARCHIVE document 5 MM file. Statements to Customs

ARCHIVE document 6 Mickey Green file.

ARCHIVE document 7 1982 Metropolitan Police Criminal Intelligence List (alphabetical) 100 most serious criminals in Met area.

ARCHIVE document 8 Hatton Garden robbery – police probe transcripts



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